

Proof sets are a 'purple passion' for '84 collectors

By Roger Boye

Uncle Sam's mailbox already is loaded with thousands of orders for 1984 proof sets, just two weeks after bureaucrats launched coin collecting's most popular annual sale.

This year's sets—dubbed “purple passion” by at least one hobby wag—cost \$11 each, the same price charged since 1981. Each set contains five coins [cent through half dollar] housed in a hard plastic case, just like the 1983 version.

But the mint has scrapped the black-and-blue color scheme used last year in favor of sets housed in purple cardboard holders with purple paper surrounding each coin inside the plastic. Mint bosses insist the change looks great.

All five coins bear the familiar “S” mint mark for San Francisco, where the government has produced proof coins since 1968. Collectors can order as many sets as they want this year, unlike in the past when Uncle Sam imposed a five-set maximum for each order.

Most hobby pros believe the mint will accept orders for several months, perhaps until the end of the year or even beyond. Mint executives say simply that they will continue processing checks until they reach production capacity, which is about 4 million sets.

No matter how long the sets remain on sale, the number purchased by collectors may fall short of capacity, due in part to competition from the mint's Olympic commemorative coins. In 1983, the first full year of Olympic offerings, workers produced just 3.3 million proof sets, down about 15 percent from 1982 and the lowest total since 1978.

Meanwhile, Uncle Sam also is accepting orders for 1984 “prestige proof sets,” a \$59 item that includes the five coins plus a 1984 Olympic silver dollar. The price is unchanged from a similar version issued last year.

To order either set, send a check or money order to the U.S. Mint, 55 Mint St., San Francisco, Calif. 94175. Allow several weeks—sometimes several months—for delivery.

Proof coins are made with specially prepared slugs and dies to create a mirrorlike finish free of blemishes. Collectors consider them the apex of the minting art.

● A well-known hobby scholar, William Pettit of Iola, Wis., will speak to the Morton Grove Coin Club at 8 p.m. next Friday in the Morton Grove Park District Building, 6834 Dempster St. Visitors are welcome to attend the meeting, which will mark the club's 20th anniversary.

● As many as 30 dealers will sell collector keepsakes next Sunday at the spring show of the Kankakee Valley Coin and Stamp Club. Hours are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Clemans Auction Gallery on Ill. Hwy. 17, about three miles west of Int. Hwy. 57.